

Annual Report 2001



UTAH FOSTER CARE CITIZEN REVIEW BOARD



OVERVIEW OF THE UTAH FCCRB

The Utah Foster Care Citizen Review Board (FCCRB) is an independent state agency, established by state law (UCA 78-3g-101-103) which organizes and conducts the review of foster care cases by panels of trained volunteer citizens. Each volunteer dedicates one or more days per month to examine the records and interview the various parties associated with approximately six to eight foster care cases per month, in order to assure that children in foster care are on track to find permanent homes. The federal mandate for periodic review of foster care cases passed Congress in 1980.

By the end of June 2001 the Utah FCCRB consisted of 402 volunteers on 44 boards throughout Utah, supported by a staff of 22, and governed by a 16 member Steering Committee representing components of the child welfare system and our volunteers.

Citizen involvement in the review of cases for children in foster care is based on the belief that children need the stability and support of a permanent home and family in order to grow and flourish. They need the sense of lifelong belonging and continuity that only a permanent home can provide. Children who grow up or linger unnecessarily long in foster care represent a huge loss in both financial and human terms.

FCCRB volunteers are citizens who are accountable to children, not to a state system. Reviewers donate their time on behalf of children. Volunteers have no tenure, no boss and no paycheck.

State guidelines require that reviewers consider:

- the necessity and appropriateness of the foster child's placement;
- whether reasonable efforts were made to prevent placement;
- if there has been progress toward the elimination of the causes for placement and the prospects for reunification;
- compliance of interested parties to the requirements of the service plan; and,
- a likely projected date for permanence.

The result of outside monitoring by objective third parties (the volunteers) is a more open and better child welfare system.

FY2001 RECOMMENDATIONS

Process for Developing Recommendations: The purpose of this annual report is to share information gathered by trained volunteers with the Division of Child and Family Services, the courts, the legislature, child welfare partners and the community. The information was gathered during the course of 1,606 reviews of the cases of 2,343 children in foster care during FY2001. In order to make these recommendations we analyzed the information gathered during review, conducted a focus group of volunteers from all areas of the state, polled our staff, and worked with the FCCRB Steering Committee and its Research and Evaluation Subcommittee. Independently, the volunteers and staff were asked to suggest recommendations for the child welfare system based on their experiences in reviews. Once all of their suggestions and concerns had been identified, each participant was given an opportunity to prioritize the recommendations. It is interesting to note that each group identified the same recommendations, and their ranking of the top four priorities was identical!

There were four areas of concern which ranked at the top of each list.

- Need for individualized Service Plans
- Increased child welfare funding
- Importance of communication and coordination between DCFS, District Court, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment partners
- Vital need for trained and competent foster parents for all levels of care

It was decided that the FCCRB would strongly support the efforts of the Division of Child and Family Services, the courts, the Attorney General, the Guardian Ad Litem Office and the Department of Human Services to work with the legislature to obtain additional funding to meet the needs of the child welfare system. We suggest these funds be used to reduce the caseloads/workloads and to increase the range and availability of services to children in out-of-home care and their families.

With regard to the need for competent trained foster parents who are able to provide care for children at all levels, the FCCRB supports the efforts of the Utah Foster Care Foundation. Their current efforts include: targeting their recruitment to meet current needs within

FY2001 RECOMMENDATIONS, *continued*

each region of the state; implementing an assessment and evaluation process for the selection of foster parents; providing training in Spanish in order to better serve Hispanic children and families; and, increasing foster parent retention through the use of the cluster program.

Increased funding and improved foster parenting are important activities that need a broad base of support. The FCCRB is interested in working with state agencies, the Foundation and any other groups to further these goals. Our volunteers felt that focusing our recommendations on activities, the results of which will, if implemented, be clearly visible during the course of reviews would be of greatest assistance to the child welfare system in continuing to move forward in its efforts to achieve permanency for children. Therefore, our recommendations will focus on service planning and the coordination of services.

I. Service Planning:

The requirement for the development of a service plan for each child in out-of-home care was first enacted in 1980 with the passage of Public Law 96-272 - the *Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act*. It required that service plans describe the circumstances which necessitated the removal of the child from the home, the steps the parents must take to remedy their behavior, and how the agency will provide services to the child and parents. The Act required that the child be placed in the least restrictive setting possible and as close as possible to their home. This federal law also required a periodic review of the service plan, the placement, and the progress being made toward reunifying the child with their family.

Best practice guidelines for service planning have been developed by the Division of Child and Family Services and many other organizations such as the Child Welfare League of America, the National Association of Foster Care Reviewers, Lutheran Social Services of Washington and Idaho and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. While there are some differences they usually contain the principles of:

- individualized service plans
- strengths based approach to meeting the needs of the family
- involvement of the family in the development of the service plan
- appropriate assessments
- clearly stated goals
- objectives that are behavioral, measurable and specific
- clear time frames for the accomplishment of the objectives
- consequences or rewards for both positive or negative actions
- suggested implementation strategies
- description of resources to be provided by each party to the case (ie., DCFS, parents, foster parents, child, etc.)

Vera I. Fahlberg, MD in *A Child's Journey Through Placement* suggests that one of the most difficult issues in service planning is the confusion between goals and implementation strategies. A goal is what you want achieved - such as a change in behavior or an increase in knowledge, whereas implementation strategies describe how these goals might be achieved. A person could reach the stated goals without using the suggested implementation strategies or they could utilize every method outlined and never make the requested changes. Dr. Fahlberg suggests that service plans should identify:

- the behaviors to be decreased
- the behaviors to be increased
- the new skills to be acquired
- the desired modification of current behaviors

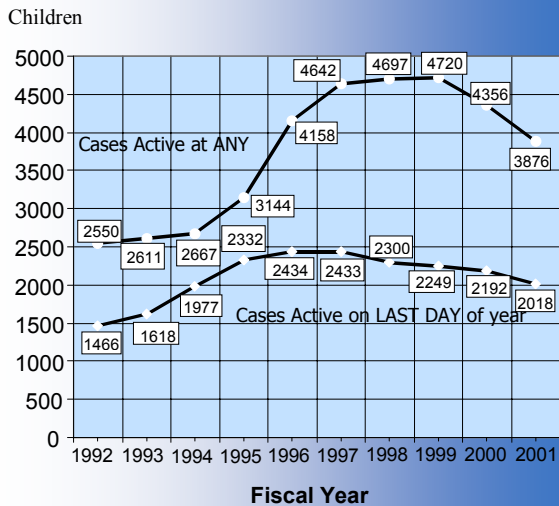
OUR MISSION



The Foster Care Citizen Review Board provides periodic case reviews for children who are in the custody of the state. These reviews are independent, confidential and provide recommendations for permanency. Citizens impact policy and practice by reviewing case file documents, meeting with interested parties to discuss progress toward permanency for the child, and by establishing an environment where children, parents and caseworkers are willing and able to provide their perspective and input in the decisions that affect their lives.

2001 RECOMMENDATIONS, *continued*

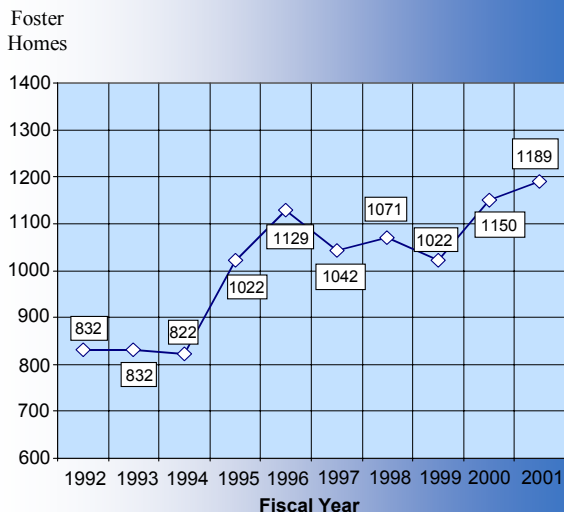
**NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN CUSTODY
FY92 TO FY01**



Source: DCFS; SAFE Data

“Cases active any time during year” includes cases that started before and ended after the beginning of the fiscal year, or started during fiscal year. Cases where a child returns home after a shelter hearing are not counted in the total foster care numbers, beginning in November 1999.

**NUMBER OF LICENSED FOSTER HOMES IN UTAH
FY92 to FY01**



Source: DCFS; SAFE Data

Utilizing some of these principles the Utah Division of Child and Family Services and other child welfare organizations across the country have developed many different templates for service planning. As far as the FCCRB is aware there has not been a "model" service plan developed that would assist caseworkers and supervisors in measuring the quality of their individual service planning efforts. DCFS has taken the first steps in this process as a result of their commitment to the implementation of the Practice Model with its unifying principles and skill development requirements. The Practice Model provides a solid foundation upon which to build a model service plan. The implementation of a model plan will assist caseworkers in providing services to children and their families which will lead to safe, stable and permanent homes for children.

Volunteer Concerns: A major concern expressed by FCCRB volunteers was that many of the service plans they see are not tailored to the specific needs of the children and families involved. (While many service plans needed improvement, the volunteers were also quick to note that there were many plans that were excellent. They specifically mentioned that when there was an individualized service plan for each child/family they observed that the goals set for the parents/children were more likely to be met!) The volunteers were also concerned that when boilerplate type language is used in a service plan the goals and objectives of the plan may be unclear to those who are required to follow the plan. A lack of specifics can create unclear expectations and leave the child vulnerable to the termination of reunification services, placement in long-term foster care and the absence of a permanent, safe and stable home. They were concerned also that a service plan that is not individualized with goals and objectives that are behavioral, measurable and specific does not adequately protect the rights of the parents and the children.

I. Service Planning Recommendation:

The Foster Care Citizen Review Board recommends the Division of Child and Family Services design and implement a model process for developing service plans, utilizing the principles and skills of the Practice Model, that are individualized and meet the requirements of law, policy and the court. Best practice indicates that this model should include (but does not need to be limited to) the concepts of the strengths/needs approach to planning, cultural responsiveness, and utilization of the Child and Family Teams to develop the service plan. The plan should describe the goals, objectives and the implementation strategies in a manner that is behavioral, measurable and specific; and, outlines the consequences for both positive and negative behavior.

II. Communication and Coordination Between Service Providers:

Volunteer Concerns: There are two specific areas where our volunteers have expressed concern about the lack of communication and coordination between service providers. (1) Our volunteers have remarked repeatedly on the fact that a large proportion of the families whose children are in foster care, and therefore reviewed by the FCCRB, have multiple issues that need to be resolved in order for them to provide a safe and stable home for their children. (2) The volunteers are also concerned that the requirements of the service plan for DCFS may be overwhelming unless there is a prioritization of objectives rather than a requirement to change all behavior at one time. In addition, if there are multiple agencies involved with the family the plans may actually be contradictory and inconsistent, or require different tasks to accomplish the same objective. With multiple service plans there are also issues of time frame requirements, prioritization of objectives, and confidentiality.

Coordination between Agencies within the Department of Human Services: During the reviews of the cases of children where there are multiple needs to be met, it

is very clear to reviewers that agencies - even those within the Department of Human Services - often do not speak the same “language,” have conflicting approaches to service planning, utilize different treatment modalities, and have their own distinct federal and state requirements, time-lines, and funding requirements and restrictions.

Of the agencies within the Department of Human Services, DCFS is subject to the most stringent federal and state laws and timetables. For example, after a child is removed from a home, the process of correcting all the problems that led to the removal must be completed within a maximum of 15 months if the child is to be returned home. The mandate of DCFS is to protect children. As a result, DCFS has the authority and responsibility to remove children from their homes if they are not safe. If the removal was appropriate, the court then orders the state to take custody of the children removed from their homes. DCFS must then prepare a service plan for the parents that addresses the reasons the children were removed, and describes the changes in conditions and behavior that are required before the children can be returned to their parents. Twelve months from the date of removal, the court must decide if the goals and objectives outlined in the service plan have been met and the child and family can be reunited. The court may postpone the decision for up to three months if the conditions are not met but progress is being made.

FCCRB volunteers, DCFS workers, parents and children know that issues relating to substance abuse, mental illness or disabilities are real and need to be appropriately addressed. However, it is often difficult to coordinate these necessary services within the requirements of federal and state child welfare laws and time-frames. Because the foster care cases have rigid deadlines, the DCFS service plan could be called the “trump” plan of all service plans that pertain to an individual or family. The DCFS service plan has to be accomplished within 12 months! The other plans may call for similar or related services or changes in behavior, or even have requirements that are contradictory to DCFS’ requirements, yet no other DHS agency has mandatory time constraints which must be built into their service plans. At present there can be three or four different service plans in place for one family. These plans need to be coordinated so the families are not presented with an overwhelming set of requirements that cannot be met. Parents with children in foster care frequently feel they are on a treadmill going nowhere, trying to meet conflicting requirements, rather than having their goals and objectives prioritized and coordinated by the agencies involved.

There are two areas where a lack of coordination may have a substantial impact on the outcome for a child in out-of-home care - substance abuse and mental health. If either of these two issues are factors contributing to the removal of a child from the home, it can be very difficult to obtain permanency for the child within the required time frames for child welfare cases under the Adoption and Safe Families Act with its 15-month time limit on a child remaining in care. Mental health issues and addictions frequently require long-term, intensive treatment. In addition, particularly in addiction treatment, there is an understanding that relapse is highly likely. Each individual responds to treatment differently and it may require several attempts to discover the appropriate method of treatment for a particular person. As a result, if a relapse does occur it is a distinct possibility that treatment may extend beyond the child welfare time frame of 15 months!

NUMBER OF REVIEWS CONDUCTED AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN REVIEWED BY REGION FY01

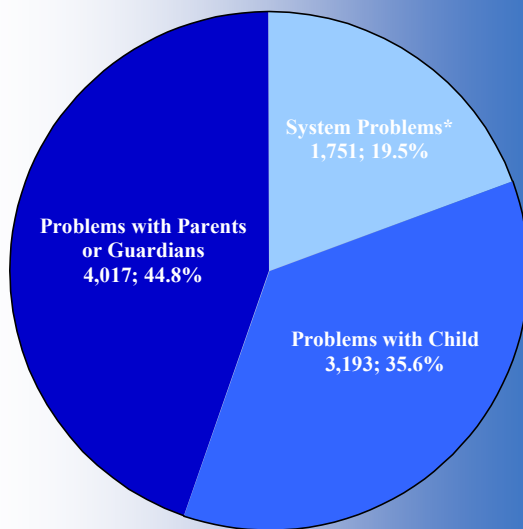
REGION	Re-views	Percent-age	Children	Percent-age
Central				
Salt Lake	788	58.59%	1,102	58.25%
Tooele	31	2.30%	46	2.43%
Sub-Total	819	60.89%	1,178	60.68%
Northern				
Brigham City	19	1.41%	36	1.90%
Logan	16	1.19%	21	1.11%
Ogden	164	12.19%	262	13.85%
Davis County	96	7.14%	136	7.19%
Sub-Total	295	21.93%	461	24.05%
Western/ SoWest				
Provo, Heber City	157	11.67%	222	11.73%
Payson	31	2.30%	50	2.64%
Richfield/Delta	28	2.08%	39	2.06%
St. George	38	2.83%	61	3.22%
Cedar City	28	2.08%	39	2.06%
Sub-Total	282	20.97%	412	21.72%
Eastern				
Price, Castle-dale	69	5.13%	93	4.92%
Roosevelt, Vernal	112	8.33%	156	8.25%
Moab	24	1.78%	31	1.64%
Blanding/Monticello	7	0.52%	8	0.42%
Sub-Total	212	15.76%	292	15.22%
Totals:	1,606	100.00%	2,343	100.00%

Source: FCCRB Database



BARRIERS TO CASE PROGRESS NOVEMBER 2000 TO JUNE 2001

During the period November 2000 to June 2001 citizen reviewers identified all the barriers to case progress that existed in each case they reviewed. The barriers may be categorized as shown in the chart below.



*System Problems	
FY2001	
DCFS	841
Placement/Provider	287
Legal	422
Community Service Resources	201
Total	1,751

Source: FCCRB Database

In FY2001 there were an average of 2,018 children in care on any given day. The top six reasons why children are removed from their homes were: neglect, dependency, delinquent behavior, physical abuse, sexual abuse and parent condition/absence. When a child is removed from his/her home for protection, workers describe the reason for the removal. They can also identify factors that contributed to the removal, such as substance abuse, housing, mental illness, inadequate parenting skills, etc. There can be more than one contributing factor in each case. Based on the cases of children currently in care there were 9,767 contributing factors listed in the DCFS information system SAFE. The category which was chosen the most as a contributing factor was Inadequate Parenting Skills, chosen 1,215 times. The next highest categories were Substance Abuse (combining alcohol abuse, drug abuse, fetal alcohol and fetal addiction) with 1,111; and, Mental Health issues with 1,029 (which includes depression, parent mental illness, role reversal, social isolation, suicide potential and family violence).

The issue of inadequate parenting skills is an area where DCFS has the expertise to provide appropriate services; however, with addiction and mental health issues DCFS must rely on other agencies to assist parents to change their behaviors. If there is a lack of coordination and/or delays, then the possibility of not being able to reunify a family increases. Coordination and communication cannot only be the responsibility of DCFS. All agencies within the Department of Human Services must be willing to work together to find the best approaches to assist families in making their homes safe for their children.

In Utah, and across the country, substance abuse issues are one of the most prevalent contributing factors to the removal of children from their homes. The Child Welfare League of America has explored the relationship between substance abuse and child welfare in the recent publication *Alcohol, Other Drugs, & Child Welfare*. This report indicates that:

Data are lacking regarding how many substance abuse treatment clients are concurrently enrolled in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and are part of the Child Protection Services caseloads as well as receiving treatment for AOD (Alcohol and Other Drugs), mental health or other problems. Numerous studies, however, have documented that those multi-problem families are the highest risk clients in each of these systems. Many of the most promising treatment programs address some or all of these issues simultaneously.

III. Coordination Between Agencies within the Department of Human Services Recommendations:

- A The Foster Care Citizen Review Board recommends the Department of Human Services develop and implement, in conjunction with its divisions and consumers, a philosophy statement and guidelines about how the Department will serve its clients - much like the Practice Model developed by the Division of Child and Family Services - in order to assist all of the Divisions to work together more effectively.
- B The Foster Care Citizen Review Board recommends the Department of Human Services develop a unified comprehensive service plan in order to incorporate the services and goals from all the agencies involved with the family. The unified plan should address: the multiple domains of the

2001 RECOMMENDATIONS, *continued*

individual family's life; describe their needs and outline the strengths of the family; identify the goals and objectives to be accomplished in a manner that is behavioral, measurable and specific; list possible implementation strategies; clarify the consequences of both positive and negative behavior; define who is responsible for each task; and, describe who will fund the activities in the plan.

- C The Foster Care Citizen Review Board recommends the various Divisions within the Department of Human Services develop and implement a collaboration strategy that will address areas of mutual concern, coordinate assessments for families with multiple needs, describe procedures for resolving conflict, outline strategies for adequate funding, and, design methods for prioritizing activities on the unified service plan.

IV. Coordination and Communication Between the Division of Child and Family Services and the Juvenile Court

Another area where both volunteers and staff see a lack of communication and coordination is in the area of receiving adequate information from the District Court regarding the status of criminal charges involving families with children in foster care. Likewise there is little sharing of information regarding the status of child welfare proceedings with the District Court. Our volunteers are concerned that child welfare caseworkers, and therefore reviewers, are often not informed about the status of criminal charges against the family members of the children on their caseloads. At times this lack of information also extends to the Assistant Attorney General and the Guardian ad Litem. Clearly the desire to protect confidentiality is involved in the reluctance to share this type of information. However, it is the understanding of the FCCRB that proceedings in District Court are a matter of public record and should be available to DCFS caseworkers. Caseworkers report that when they do try to obtain information there are roadblocks; therefore, many have stopped trying. For example, if probation officers do not have access to the results of child welfare proceedings in Juvenile Court they may be permitting activities that are contrary to orders of the Juvenile Court. On the other hand, if DCFS and the Juvenile Court do not receive information about the status of a criminal case from the District Court they may be developing a service plan or making permanency decisions that are not appropriate. This coordination should not be limited to child abuse charges being pursued in District Court, but should include all criminal charges.

V. Coordination and Communication Between the Division of Child and Family Services and the Juvenile Court Recommendation

The Foster Care Citizen Review Board recommends the Division of Child and Family Services and the Court develop and implement a procedure to facilitate the sharing of information which does not violate rules of confidentiality or the rights of individuals.

Afterword: The fact that the Foster Care Citizen Review Board has made the recommendations listed above does not mean that nothing is happening at the present time to address these issues. In an effort to obtain as much information as possible, FCCRB staff contacted staff at the various agencies involved as partners in the child welfare system to discuss our proposed recommendations and to discover any plans to address the issues raised by our volunteers. The FCCRB was extremely pleased to learn that some efforts are already underway to address many of these issues and that the various agencies welcomed our support. The Foster Care Citizen Review Board is eager to facilitate or support these collaboration efforts in any way possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTINUING IN STATE CUSTODY FY01

FCCRB Dispositional Report: Recommendations
Item A. Is it in the best interest of the child/youth
to continue in State Custody?

	Number	Percent
Yes	2,165	92.4%
No	79	3.4%
Partial	53	2.3%
Not Applicable	5	0.2%
Undetermined*	41	1.8%
Total	2,343	100%

*Not enough information

Source: FCCRB Database

At the time of reviews, the Foster Care Citizen Review Board considers whether it is in the best interest of the child to continue in state custody. In the vast majority of cases, it is. The board may recommend that the child be moved to a different foster home or to a different type of "out-of-home" setting.

PERMANENCY GOALS: CURRENT AND RECOMMENDED FY01

At each review, the Foster Care Citizen Review Board considers whether the permanency goal established by DCFS and the Court, for the child, is appropriate given the circumstances as reported during the review. As a result of these reviews the following recommendations were made by Citizen Review Boards regarding the permanency goals established by DCFS and the Court.

Continue with Goal:	1,641	70%
Change the Goal:	643	27%
Undetermined:	59	3%
	2,343	100%

Where the FCCRB agrees that the current goal should be continued, the rate of agreement varies somewhat among the goal categories. As shown below, the FCCRB agrees with Adoption goals in 95% of the cases, but agrees with Return or Remain Home goals in only 67.7% of the cases.

Rate of FCCRB Agreement, by Goal		
Current Goal:	Children	Percentage Agreement
Return or Remain Home	788	62.5%
Long Term Foster Care	412	79.2%
Adoption	272	96.5%
Independent Living	97	87.4%
Guardianship	57	48.7%
Unknown	15	
Total	1,641	70%

HOW TO BECOME A VOLUNTEER

OUR VISION



Every child deserves a safe,
secure, healthy, permanent home
with a family.

YOU CAN HELP!

Volunteer to become a member of your local Citizen Review Board! There is a Board close to you. There are 44 Boards in the following communities: Logan, Brigham City, Ogden, Davis County, Salt Lake City, Tooele, Provo, Payson, Richfield/Central Utah, Cedar City, St. George, Vernal, Roosevelt/Ft. Duchesne, Price, Moab and Blanding/ Monticello.

The Foster Care Citizen Review Board is an independent state agency which serves children in foster care statewide. We are the agency designated to conduct the federally required reviews of children in foster care. Our goal is to improve the effectiveness of the public systems charged with the protection and well-being of children in foster care by involving citizens in the case review process. Federal law requires that children be reviewed every six months. As a member of a Citizen Review Board you will be given the training and support necessary to review the cases of children in out-of-home care and to assess the progress being made in achieving a permanent home for the child and assure that each child's needs are met.

You will talk to foster children and their caseworkers, foster parents, legal advocates, and children. Along with other trained volunteers who comprise the Board, you will make recommendations to the Division of Child and Family Services, the Juvenile Court and our other partners as to the best course of action for the child.

You have the potential to become an advocate for children who need nurturing, supportive and permanent homes; an educator of the public on the plight of children and families; a "check and balance" of the child welfare system; and, a catalyst for system reform and the creation of new and better community resources.

To inquire, call 468-0036 if you are in Salt Lake City. If you are outside Salt Lake City call toll free 1-877-877-0296.



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Foster Care Citizen Review Board

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